Not “don’t be evil” anymore

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paul_dennehy 18m

> ShotShot:
>
> half-baked, unaccountable, non-human pseudo-expertise

seems like a pretty extreme mischaracterization of this project that iNat is working on. The idea is that the AI makes an attempt to summarize the millions of pieces of human expertise currently spread throughout the website and turn it into something accessible. And of course if we actual human experts notice a mistake in what it generates, we correct it, just like we do with CV mistakes in IDs now. At the very least, “unaccountable” seems like a poor description of what this project would generate.

My take on this whole situation is that it’s way to complex for me to have an opinion one way or the other. It’s easy to just point to big numbers of water use or carbon emission and say “ergo this is bad, end of discussion”. It’s easy to just trot out all the standard pro- and anti-AI arguments and apply them to this specific undertaking. What I don’t see in really any of the comments about this project is unbiased cost-benefit analysis. Sure, AI uses resources and produces pollution. How does the impact of the use of AI for this *specific* proposal compare to the impact of using humans to do the same thing? If we want to add ID pointers to 100,000 species *without* AI, how many people working on how many devices connected to how

many servers for how many hours would *that* take? What's the environmental impact of that? How much better would the quality of the ID pointers be than what the AI comes up with? How much cheaper or more expensive would this be? I don't have answers to these questions, and I'm not going to let my own pro- or anti-AI bias take over and invent answers that "seem right" to me. These are the exact questions that iNat staff are working on answering right now, and I'm content to wait and see what they find before grabbing my pitchfork or singing their praises.

As for the CV, here's my personal story about it. I've been interested in insects since the 90s, and finding insects generally requires finding their host plants. Unfortunately, I spent so much time learning insects that I never had the time to try to learn plants. When I found the CV, I decided to go around and use it to see what plants I had in my area. Sure, it didn't get the IDs right 100% of the time, but it put correct names on more than 9/10 of the plants I showed it, and over the past three years, I've gone from not knowing anything more than a few common trees to being able to put names on nearly all the plants I encounter in my county. At this point I don't need the CV to make my IDs locally anymore, but I never would have gone through this learning process without it. Obviously, the actual human identifiers are ultimately to thank, but without the instant in-the-field IDs to get me started, I don't think their expertise would ever have made its way into my brain. Now that I know what I'm doing, I've found state-threatened orchids on my property that I'd never have known to protect, surveyed all my local county parks and documented nearly 1,000 plant species, and made friends with some botanists. *Could* I have done all this the old-fashioned way without the CV? Of course. I did it with insects before iNat even existed. But *would* I have? I honestly don't think so. Did I have a larger environmental impact than I would have if I'd learned from paper field guides like I did in the 90s? Probably. Was the learning curve

faster and steeper though? Also probably. Was the data I've now collected worth the cost? That's a value judgement, so decide for yourself. Am I just a lazy entitled millennial who only thrives when offered instant gratification? Sure, I guess. Will offering instant gratification in the form of CV-identifications make more people get interested in nature and further iNat's goals? I suspect so.

To really have an informed opinion on these issues, we need hard numbers on engagement, cost, and environmental impact for the specific project in question. But we also need to answer difficult questions like "how many pounds of carbon emission is it worth to get one person interested in one taxon?" "How many gallons of gas is worth burning per new species record obtained on my trip?" "How much electricity is worth spending to argue my point on the iNaturalist forum?" "How much environmental impact from server maintenance is it worth for me to create this record on iNat?" There are so many tradeoffs and so many value judgements that go into these decisions that I can't justify making a blanket "get AI out of here before it destroys us all!" or "AI is the future, get on board you luddite!" take.

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lakekoshare **18m**

I don't know if it is evil, but Google should not have changed the name of Gulf of Mexico to Gulf of America before the name change was approved by all nations surrounding the Gulf. Google should not be giving its map making over to the whims of an egotist. If they give in to 47 so quickly are they the best repository for iNaturalist data?

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anfra1969 **17m**

MeltedMottle for president !🤣😂🤣

I still find nothing to learn from this!

Maybe expect, that a world full of drones will be more polite? More silent too? Engaged? Creative? Maybe motivate human intellect then through a bonus system for all sorts of social involvement in which INat could participate and give credit to its users? Brave New World.

Won't be my world. I'll leave it to them and will silently disappear. I could re-name my account to "Dodo 1969". Maybe in Q1 2026.

replying...

Suggested Related	Replies	Views	Activity
Observations "hiding" in other observations; Share your examples! 191	498	20.1k	3d
Is there a way to mass download photos from your observations on iNat? 4	12	505	6d
What's the worst pic you uploaded to iNat? 351	564	16.4k	6d
What would make AI on iNaturalist tolerable to you? 6 ai	72	2.2k	6d
Neurodiversity and iNaturalist! 26	456	26.2k	Jun 17

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